

Public Hearing Testimony
Select Committee for Children
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H.B.5186 An Act Adopting A Foster Parent Bill of Rights

Good afternoon Madame Chair Urban and Madame Chair Gerratana, members of the Select Committee for Children, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am an adoptive parent and former foster parent from Waterbury. I am here today to ask for your support for the foster parent bill of rights.

Being a foster parent was a wonderful, rewarding, challenging and at times frustrating experience.

My first placement from DCF was a 13 yr. old girl, when my husband and I met her we initially liked her and hoped to adopt her. We were told she was a great student, a little boy crazy; overall she had no major problems and was a normal teenage girl. We were not told about her history.

During the month she lived with us, I realized none of what we were told was true. I constantly received phone calls she was cutting classes, she lied about everything, the biggest issue we had was her relationship with my husband. If my husband held my hand she would push me aside and grab his hand, she told me he was not my husband and even ripped up our wedding pictures.

During the course of the month she was with us, she was completely out of control and I knew I was unable to help her. I did not have the training or support needed. When I pleaded with her caseworker to have her removed I was called a coward because I could not deal with her.

Her former therapeutic worker called to ask how the placement was going. I regrettably informed her that it had not worked out; she informed me this girl had been previously placed in therapeutic homes only with single mothers. Sadly, she had been so severely abused by men she did not know how to relate to a male father figure in an appropriate manner.

She also informed me this child was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Reactive Attachment Disorder. I was unfamiliar with those diagnoses at the time and had no idea of the implications or treatment.

A few years later when my daughter, who we were fostering at the time, was 15 months old, we were asked to bring her 5 year old sister in our home. I agreed to do this; I understand the importance of sibling relationships. Shortly after she moved in with us, I noticed worrisome behavior. She would pin the baby on the floor and refuse to let her up. This became such a problem that I had to take the baby with me if I needed to go to the restroom or go to the kitchen to prepare dinner.

One day her kindergarten teacher told me she had an explosive episode; she pulled everything off the shelves and desks and destroyed personal property.

I informed her caseworker and asked for her to get her into therapy. I found her medical folder; in the back of it was a DSMIV diagnosis for Reactive Attachment Disorder that had been given the previous year. When I asked her caseworker and a DCF supervisor about it I was told that was not a valid diagnosis, and asked why I wanted her in therapy, I told them I wanted this child to get the treatment and services she needed.

I called the safe house where the diagnosis was given and was told it was indeed a valid diagnosis. A few weeks after she started therapy, she was again diagnosed with RAD and I was told by her psychiatrist to hide all my knives and scissors, any sharp objects I had because she was deemed a threat. She was removed a shortly after that because her psychiatrist said she was a danger to her baby sister.

I was disturbed and saddened that this very intelligent beautiful little girl had a diagnosis for over a year without any treatment.

These are only a few incidents I experienced; we fostered our now adopted daughter for forty five months before celebrating her adoption. During that time we never received notice of court hearings, and I did not know I had the right to be informed of them or to possibly speak at them.

It is my hope the foster parent bill of rights will encourage foster parents to continue to advocate for themselves and the children in their care. That foster parents will be respected as team members, their concerns and opinions toward the children in their care will be heard.

There are currently 16 states that have enacted a foster parent bill of rights, California, Pennsylvania, and Maryland are among them. It is my hope Connecticut will be the 17th.